

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-11

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FM AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 2119

LIMITED OFFICIAL USE NEW DELHI 8979

CALCUTTA 0957 FOLLOWS. SENT TO NEW DELHI FOR ACTION ON 9 JUN 78.

BEING RPT FOR YOUR ACTION/INFO.

QUOTE

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E.O. 11652: NA

TAGS: PINT SOPN IN BG

SUBJECT: EDITORIAL AND OTHER REACTION IN WEST BENGAL TO ZIA'S
BANGLADESH PRESIDENTIAL VICTORY

REF: NEW DELHI 8800

1. EDITORIAL COMMENT IN WEST BENGAL ON PRESIDENT ZIA'S
ELECTORAL VICTORY IN BANGLADESH IS NOT GREATLY DIFFERENT
FROM THE REACTION OF THE NATIONAL PAPERS DESCRIBED IN REFTEL.

2. BOTH THE ADVANTAGES OF INCUMBENCY AND ALLEGATIONS OF
RIGGING ARE GENERALLY MENTIONED BY THE PAPERS WHICH, IN
ADDITION TO THE STATESMAN, HAVE COMMENTED FORMALLY;
AMRITA BAZAR, HUNDUSTAN STANDARD, ANANDA BAZAR, JUGANTAR
AND SATYAJUG. ASIDE FROM JUGANTAR, WHICH IS THE MOST
NEGATIVE SAYING NO DICTATOR EVER LOSES, ZIA'S OVERWHELMING
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MARGIN IS FULLY RECOGNIZED, AND IT IS CONSIDERED
SUFFICIENTLY LARGE THAT ZIA'S WIN CANNOT BE EXPLAINED BY
HIS USE OF DOUBTFUL TACTICS. GENERAL ZIA'S PERSONAL
POPULARITY AS A SOLIDER OF THE FREEDOM STRUGGLE IS
ACKNOWLEDGED, AND THE PLEBICITE IS ALSO CALLED
"A VOTE AGAINST ANY FUTHER TURMOIL, DISORDER
AND UNCERTAINTY, OF WHICH BANGLADESH HAS HAD A

SURFIET IN THE PAST THREE YEARS". AMRITA NOTES ZIA'S "ANTI-INDIA PLATFORM" BUT SEES NOTHING NEW IN IT, AND OBSERVES THAT IT HAS NOT PREVENTED HIM FROM SEEKING GOOD NEIGHBORLY RELATIONS WITH INDIA. WITH SOME PRESSIMINISM AS TO WHAT CAN BE ACTUALLY EXPECTED, THE HOPE IS REPEATEDLY EXPRESSED THAT ZIA WILL CONTINUE THE CIVILIANIZING AND DEMOCRATIZING TREND OF HIS REGIME, AND IT IS OBSERVED THAT IF HE CAN GIVE BANGLADESH A FUTHER PERIOD OF POLITICAL STABILITY AND SOME ECONOMIC ADVANCE, HE WILL BE IN A VERY STRONG POSITION.

3. THE ABOVE, ALTHOUGH ITSELF A LITTLE JAUNDICED, IS PROBABLY MORE THE POLITE, THAN THE GENUINE WEST BENGAL (I.E. BENGALI HINDU) REACTION. NEITHER THE STATE GOVERNMENT NOR PUBLIC OPINION HERE WISHES FUTHER INSTABILITY AND DISORDER IN BANGLADESH, WITH THEIR POSSIBLE CONSEQUENCE OF FRESH LARGE REFUGEE MOVEMENTS INTO INDIA. HOWEVER, ZIA IS GENERALLY CONSIDERED AN AUTOCRAT, AND IS LOOKED UPON AS TOO MUCH MUSLIM AND TOO LITTLE BENGALI IN STYLE AND OUTLOOK TO BE WARMLY APPRECIATED ON THIS SIDE OF THE BORDER. IN LINE WITH THIS, WE UNDERSTAND MOST WEST BENGALIS WOULD ATTRIBUTE HIS TRIUMP, IF NOT TO RIGGING THEN AT LEAST TO MANIPULATIVE RATHER THAN CONSULTATIVE POLITICS, AND GREET IT WITHOUT GREAT RELISH.

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